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## **CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS UNITE TO PROTECT ENDANGERED BUTTERFLIES**

### **35 Accredited zoos and aquariums sign on as founding members**

**SILVER SPRING, MD** – The American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) today announced the formation of the Butterfly Conservation Initiative (BFCI), a program designed to bring together non-governmental organizations and government agencies to aid the recovery of imperiled butterflies in North America. AZA, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Wildlife Federation, the Xerces Society and 35 AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums recently founded the BFCI in response to the alarming recent decline in butterfly populations.

Butterflies and other insects are excellent indicators of the overall health of an ecosystem. "People know butterflies as colorful, ephemeral creatures that delight us on sunny days," says Sydney Butler, executive director of AZA. "What they might not realize is that insects pollinate the vast majority of all food plants on Earth. The loss of butterflies and other pollinators would be an aesthetic and biological disaster." Butterflies, like many invertebrates, are threatened by habitat loss due to urbanization, the widespread use of pesticides and the introduction of invasive species that out compete obligate host plants.

"Effective conservation of threatened and endangered species is based on a partnership between people and the government. The Butterfly Conservation Initiative exemplifies this principle, and could serve as a model for other cooperative endangered species conservation efforts," said Interior Secretary Gale Norton. "Together, we can work to conserve and recover these amazing species for future generations."

Currently, there are 22 federally listed (some are listed as threatened, some endangered) butterfly species, but that number is likely to grow without significant efforts to halt the decline. BFCI members will aim to recover imperiled butterfly populations by raising public awareness about habitat protection and by undertaking

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restoration efforts where appropriate. The participating organizations will work together to involve the public in outreach, education and community conservation activities. The BFCI will focus initially on the Karner blue butterfly, an ideal start because the founding partners, including the Toledo Zoo, have already done so much to aid its recovery. Xerces Society researchers, working with AZA and USFWS biologists will develop a “matrix of needs” for all 23 imperiled species so that the BFCI targets its efforts and maximizes the impact of its butterfly recovery work.

On June 13-14, 2002, the founding members of the BFCI will meet in Toledo, Ohio, to begin work on this ambitious project. Abilene Zoo, Akron Zoo, Albuquerque Biological Park, Audubon Nature Institute, Baltimore Zoo, Binder Park Zoo, Bronx Zoo, Calgary Zoo, Central Florida Zoological Park, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, Cincinnati Zoo, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Dallas World Aquarium, Disney’s Animal Kingdom, Detroit Zoological Park, Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo, Henry Vilas Zoo, John Ball Park Zoo, The Living Desert, Louisville Zoo, Miami Metrozoo, National Aquarium in Baltimore, Oklahoma City Zoo, Oregon Zoo, Potawatomi Zoo, Racine Zoological Gardens, Reid Park Zoo Teen Volunteers, Roger Williams Park Zoo, San Antonio Zoo, Santa Barbara Zoo, Seneca Park Zoo Society, Toledo Zoo, Toronto Zoo, and the Woodland Park Zoo have signed on as founding members for this project. The BFCI has also recently received a challenge grant for \$52,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and \$10,000 from the USFWS to support this initiative.

The American Zoo and Aquarium Association was founded in 1924 and currently represents 205 accredited zoos and aquariums in North America. AZA’s mission is to support membership excellence in conservation, education, science and recreation.